



Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

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Testimony of Lisa P. Sementilli, Deputy Director

RE: H.B. No. 6380, AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2013 (budget bill)

S.B. No. 1013, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HUMAN SERVICES (human services budget implementer)

Before the Appropriations Committee March 4, 2011

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony.

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness would like to thank you for your leadership in preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut. We applaud Governor Malloy for recognizing that the funds we need to solve our deficit cannot be found in the pockets of those who are living without a safe, affordable home. Indeed, we are grateful for the Governor's landmark proposal to build 150 new units of supportive housing. We vow to assure that these units are accessible to chronically homeless individuals and families who are the most vulnerable and have been homeless the longest.

According to our newly published *Portraits of Homelessness in Connecticut*, Connecticut's emergency shelters have exceeded 100% capacity for well over a year. Almost 15,000 individuals used our emergency and transitional housing programs last year. The research indicates that far more families experience housing instability and homelessness than can be served by our fragile prevention and shelter system -- *an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*

The federal stimulus-funded homeless prevention and rapid re-housing program, which has provided assistance to prevent homelessness for more than 3,500 people in just over one year, exhausts its funding very soon. Half of the Connecticut programs have already closed intake for prevention and the rest will follow soon. High unemployment and the high cost of housing have contributed to a groundswell of need for this program.

Good news: we know how to end homelessness in Connecticut. State government and local communities have prevented increases in chronic homelessness through the development of more than 4,000 units of supportive housing over the last ten years. However, supportive housing alone will only help us end homelessness for a small portion of the homeless population in Connecticut. (Less than 1/5 of our homeless residents have chronic needs which are best served through supportive housing.)

The federal strategic plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors*, and the nascent work in Connecticut to create a similar plan for our state, sets bold goals for ending homelessness for all populations. New federal laws create new challenges, requirements and outcome measures for state and local communities this year. We offer two specific recommendations which would prevent some families from entering shelter, rapidly re-house others and certainly reduce the duration of shelter stays.

Housing subsidies are the most effective way to prevent and end family

homelessness. Adding rental assistance vouchers and re-opening the Security Deposit Guarantee program would help to achieve the federal goals and make Connecticut more competitive for federal homelessness assistance dollars. Please consider three recommendations on behalf of the homeless persons in Connecticut:

- **Provide an additional 100 state-funded Rental Assistance Vouchers** so that CCEH may work immediately with DSS to identify families who are already on the waiting list for RAP and are living in our emergency shelters and transitional living programs. DSS already contracts with providers for assistance with re-housing and stabilization support for these families; all we need are some vouchers. With this addition, we could move 100 families -- approximately 300 people -- from our overtaxed emergency shelters. This would stabilize families and reducing the demand on shelters that are forced to turn away families with young children every day.
- **SB 1013 would re-open the Security Deposit Guarantee Program**, enabling many households to exit shelter or obtain short term stability and economic security. However, SB 1013 would change the look back/waiting period for families who have received SDGP assistance from 18 months to five years. Lower-income families typically experience mobility much more often than every five years. We must assure that the Security Deposit Guarantee Program is re-opened and that it is accessible to homeless families to prevent homelessness and return quickly to housing if they do become homeless. We ask you to reject this provision. **We believe and 18-24 month look back period is more appropriate in this context.**
- **HB 6380 would cut a DCF pilot program for homeless and runaway youth.** We ask that you restore this. Connecticut is now seeing a significant growth in homelessness among youth, aged 18-24. About half have experienced interpersonal violence; many are pregnant/ parenting. Youth who are involved in the criminal justice system; identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) or age out of foster care are at high risk for homelessness. We need to identify and engage these young adults before they become the next generation of chronically homeless adults.

We ask that you do everything you can to approve the Governor's principled avoidance of cuts to homeless and housing services to balance the budget. Thank you so very much for your leadership and hard work on behalf of Connecticut residents experiencing homelessness.